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ABSTRACT

In times of scarce resources, college faculty consider the decision making process to be too time consuming in light of the potential pay-off, and in times of scarce human resources, universities frequently face the problem of overworking a few bright individuals. Speech faculty members' survival depends to a large extent upon their extensive participation in university-wide decision making bodies, while departments must use all the available means of persuasion to see that their most appropriate members are appointed to significant committees, such as curriculum, academic foundations, and budget. In addition, in times of scarce resources, the decision making process will involve and increase the number of negative decisions. In such instances the decision making process will need to rely more heavily upon predetermined policy choices rather than on-demand, individual-case decisions. The speech department is in a position to make more rational decisions relevant to coping with budget cutbacks when those cutbacks are only potential or probable. Departments should also establish departmental guidelines for promotion and tenure that are more stringent than the university-wide standards. Furthermore, departments can no longer afford the luxury of approving a new course each time a new faculty member is hired. Rather, they must approve courses that serve as components of quality. To cope with all these changes, departmental decisions must be made more systematically. (HOD)

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DECISION MAKING IN TIMES OF
SCARCE HUMAN & FINANCIAL RESOURCES

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DECISION MAKING IN TIMES OF
SCARCE HUMAN & FINANCIAL RESOURCES

If Thomas Paine really believed that his were "the times that try men's souls," or if the ancient Hebrew slaves of Egypt actually thought unreasonable Pharaoh's demand that they produce a higher quality and a greater quantity of bricks without the accustomed appropriation of state-supplied straw, perhaps they should spend a few months as academic administrators in the 1980's. These are indeed trying times for the academy. We are beginning to feel the effects of the declining birth rate, with little relief in sight until the turn of the century. According to the Carnegie Council's Report on Youth, the number of 18-24 year olds in the population will drop by 23% between now and 1997. Years of double-digit inflation have not been reflected in the legislative appropriations for faculty salaries, maintenance and operations, capital outlay, and repair/renovation. Consequently, we are faced with underpaid, overworked, illsupplied faculty members and physical plants which were architecturally designed for an era of cheap energy, rather than the current decade of \$35-40 per barrel oil. As if these problems were not, in and of themselves practically insurmountable, we are also confronted with a society which has grown tired of its tax burden -- a society which has adopted the Howard Jarvis battle cry "I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it any more" -- a society which all too eagerly generalizes from Senator Proxmire's list of superfluous research projects conducted on college campuses at taxpayer expense -- a society which is openly skeptical of the value of a college education -- a society disillusioned with the product of the ivory tower -- a society which is indeed ready to demand more accountability in the form of educational quality, but unwilling to supply enough tax dollars to support that quality.

In times of scarce resources, the decision making process will frequently be viewed as too time-consuming in light of the potential pay-off. For more than half a century we have taught our students that systematic decision making involves painstaking gathering of evidence, careful analysis of alternatives, and further reflection upon the selected alternative. Such a deliberate approach to academic decision-making was rarely practiced in academe, however, during those golden years when programs were growing and dollars were flowing. A large number of programs experienced such rapid growth during the decade of the 1960's, that administrators and faculty committees felt they could not afford the time to carefully weigh each program and personnel decision. A review of our curricula will reveal that, without really examining how those courses fit within any overall departmental philosophy, many of us added "fad" courses or courses that were little more than esoteric extensions of a new faculty member's dissertation. In addition, the majority of our departments nationwide are still living with one or more personnel "mistakes" -- individuals hired on the whim of a departmental chairperson or through the good old boy network, without a careful scrutinizing of credentials. These same individuals later received "social tenure and social promotions". During those growth years, however, chairpersons who did expend the effort and faculty members who took time to develop program emphases, solid curricula, and long range plans -- who carefully weighed their hiring, retention, promotion, and tenure decisions -- could at least rationalize that the time spent away from their personal research interests and course-related activities was well invested. The potential extrinsic rewards were well worth the time spent in the decision making process.

The frenzied atmosphere of the rapid growth years is now behind us. In a steady-state atmosphere, we should be able to catch our breath and carefully

analyze where we are, where we have been, and where we need to be going. In short, we are in a position to emphasize program and personnel quality rather than quantity. Time spent in such decision making activity, however, will be viewed as wasted time by many individuals. The potential pay-offs of the 1960's and early 1970's rarely exist. We cannot assume that quality planning and quality teaching in a M. A. program might one day result in a doctoral program; that increases in enrollment will be compensated with additional F.T.E.'s; that our quality faculty will receive tenure or promotion; or that our carefully documented proposals stand any greater likelihood of approval than hastily prepared requests. After all, if the money isn't there, are we more likely to get it with a documented ten page request, than with an undocumented two page report?

Our own university utilizes a modified zero-based budgeting approach, in which departments annually submit requests for funding at four different levels. The first level details the department's spending priorities in the event of a 3% cut in the budget; the second level outlines what would be done with exactly the same budget as the current year's funding; the third level depicts a 3% increase scenario; and the final level is without restriction. In my four years at the university, I have noted a steadily decreasing faculty interest in the budgeting decision meetings. The prevalent attitude reflects defeatism insofar as increases are concerned. I confess that I have not spent as much time with levels three and four as I did even two years ago. Faculty members are likely to concern themselves only with the question of summer teaching at a level #1 or level #2 budget. If they are included there, they seem to lose interest in the meetings where the other spending priorities of the department are debated.

Our task will also be to motivate our academic decision makers with intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards. A higher quality program, a better

educated student, a superior faculty are outcomes that are worthy in and of themselves. We will all need to realize that there are quality decisions that require massive outlays of new monies, but there are others that emerge from refocusing program thrusts, and reallocating existing resources.

Recognizing the time-consuming nature of systematic decision-making, the chairperson should seek a balance between effort expended and outcomes probable. We will further frustrate ourselves and our faculties, if every decision involves a large number of person-hours and exhaustive analysis and investigation. We will simply need to realize that outcomes must approximate the energy expended in the decision making process.

In times of scarce human resources, we frequently face the problem of overworking a few bright individuals. All of us know how easy it is for a dependable committee member to soon become "over-committed". If we are to continue to conduct our research and teach our classes, we must share the committee load within the department and across the university. It will be more difficult to motivate the younger faculty to participate actively in the decision-making process, since they will realize all too well that committee service is often discounted in tenure decisions. Such faculty will probably adopt a style which calls for minimum participation in departmental affairs, minimum preparation for classes, and maximum effort in research and publication. I for one, believe that our survival depends to a large extent upon our extensive participation in university-wide decision making bodies. We must use all the available means of persuasion to see that our most appropriate faculty members are appointed to significant committees -- curriculum, Academic Foundations, budget, etc.

We will of course need to monitor and coordinate committee assignments. Perhaps we can arrive at a formula, which includes one college or university

level committee for each of our faculty members, and then see that they are not overloaded at the departmental level.

In times of scarce resources, the decision making process will involve an increase in the number of negative decisions. Faculty as well as chairpersons enjoy the luxury of the ability to make a positive recommendation. Surely, we must all realize that the days when the majority of our decisions will result in approval of tenure or promotion or the allocation of additional funds for special projects are over. More and more of our individual and committee decisions will be negative decisions. Not all of us possess the intestinal fortitude necessary for the making of negative decisions.

Fearing later reprisals, nontenured faculty or faculty who have not yet reached the highest professorial rank, will be reluctant to serve on a decision making committee where decisions will be viewed as distasteful or negative. Tenured faculty value their "good-old-person" image within and outside the department so highly that they are likely to avoid being identified with unpopular decision making bodies.

In times of scarce resources, the decision making process will need to rely more heavily upon predetermined policy choices rather than on-demand, individual-case decisions. The zero-based budgeting system which I alluded to earlier is a prime example of this point. I contend that my colleagues and I are in a position to make more rational decisions relevant to coping with budget cutbacks, when those cutbacks are only potential or probable. We are likely to be too emotional if we wait until we have received a lump sum allocation from our Dean, and realize that the allocation is several per cent less than it was the previous year. Another example is the development of a systematic approach to the allocation of travel monies -- an approach which rewards attendance of professional meetings with a small base allocation, while

compensating those who are participating in an official capacity at proportionally higher rates. While our travel committee is authorized to make exceptions to the general policy statement, I have found that travel allocation decisions during a year when we were cut 3% in our operating budget, are significantly easier. We have also established specific departmental guidelines for promotion and tenure -- guidelines which are more stringent than the university-wide standards. These guidelines have facilitated our tenure and promotion decision making considerably. In addition, we have formalized our procedures for annual evaluation of faculty. Our policy requires student, peer, and chairperson evaluation of teaching. Consequently, an individual who may be having some problems in the classroom does not need to be singled out for a public execution. Rather, that individual is evaluated along with everyone else, tenured as well as untenured. I do not argue for documentation of policy to the extent that the departmental secretary could run the department, simply by referring inquiring faculty members to the appropriate policy statement in the departmental handbook. I do argue that in times of scarce resources, we cannot afford the antics of the departmental benevolent dictator, who parcels out the department's resources to those who happen to ask at the right time or in the appropriate manner. Such general policy statements should cover program development, personnel selection and retention, as well as resource allocation. We need to establish specific priorities in each of our programs. Those priorities will guide our decision regarding a new course proposal or the proposed revision of an existing course. Those priorities will aid us in the selection of new faculty members, as well as in our retention and tenure decisions.

My final postulate is that in times of scarce resources, the decision making process is more critical than in times of plentiful resources. As I

stated earlier, hasty decisions regarding personnel resulted in the tenuring and promoting of individuals during periods of rapid growth, who should not have been tenured or promoted. We have been able to live with those mistakes in most of our departments, because we have enjoyed the continued influx of new blood--bright, young faculty members eager to make their mark in the university and the profession. We will be hiring and promoting fewer and fewer individuals. We must earn the reputation on campus of being our own best policeman. In four years at Southwest, I can proudly say that every individual recommended by the departmental evaluation committee and myself for tenure or promotion, has received the ultimate endorsement of the President and the Board of Regents. There are many departments on our campus that currently bat about .500 in the tenure/promotion game. Their strategy is to be as generous as possible in their evaluations, and allow the higher administrative committees to be the bad guys. Such an approach to the tenure/promotion decision process is dangerous for two reasons: (1) Higher administrative committees will begin to evaluate the entire department on the basis of the credentials of individuals whom they view as unworthy of tenure or promotion. Such will leave the department more susceptible to becoming a target for cutbacks in times of financial exigency. (2) If the higher committees fail to cull out the individuals who were socially promoted or socially tenured at the departmental level, the department becomes the long range loser. Perhaps some really excellent faculty member in that department will later be deprived of a promotion or will fail to receive tenure, because the department is too heavily tenured or already has too many people in the higher ranks.

Annual retention decisions are more important in times of scarce resources. We all recall times when a tenure track individual was allowed most, if not all, of the probationary period to prove himself/herself, with very

little effort to annually evaluate that faculty member's progress toward tenure. I contend that the days when we could afford to live with our hiring mistakes for more than one or two years are now over. There is a more than ample supply of bright students emerging from our graduate schools seeking the opportunity to prove themselves. It is unfair to the capable teacher who is unemployed and to our students who deserve a quality education if we for humane reasons continue to renew the contracts of untenured faculty members who are not doing the job in the classroom and in the research room.

Program decisions are more important in times of scarce resources. Many universities and some state coordinating boards have adopted a zero-growth policy regarding curriculum proposals. For each new course added, there must be a course deleted. We can no longer afford the luxury of approving a new course each time we hire a new faculty member. Rather, we must approve courses that serve as components of quality, rather than fadish, programs.

Fiscal management is more critical in times of scarce resources. We will need to spend more time planning, analyzing, and monitoring our monetary matters. A fiscal mistake today is significantly more detrimental to a department than it would have been fifteen, or even ten years ago. When capital outlay expenditures are minimal, they must be considered within the larger picture of a three to five year package. Indeed, we may find it beneficial in the long run, to purchase an equipment component in a given year which will not be functional until it is complemented with equipment purchases over the next two years. I would argue that waiting three years for equipment that is really necessary is far superior to simply spending our capital outlay money on less expensive, less necessary items, simply because they are what we can

afford in a given year. Merit salary increases must be weighed more cautiously during these difficult economic times. When there is a large amount of money to parcel out, our mistakes do not come back to haunt us. However, when merit funds are sparse, we must carefully evaluate all qualified individuals, and base our decisions upon clearly articulated criteria. Since the IRS has ruled that in certain instances lump-sum merit awards are non-taxable, we should consider merit awards which do not become a permanent attachment to annual salaries. This will benefit the faculty member in the immediate sense, in that he/she will realize the total amount of the merit increment. It will benefit the department in the long run, in that merit can be tied to recent productivity. A \$1,000 merit award, tied to a faculty member's salary is an exhausted resource. The one-time grant is a renewable resource which may be allocated annually to different individuals. In times of scarce human resources, when we may soon see the end to the steady stream of new research-oriented faculty who can be depended upon for the department's research productivity, we will need continued output from tenured faculty members at the Associate and Full Professorial levels.

In this paper I have advanced the notion that when times are most difficult, our decisions must be made more systematically. Even in the best of economic and political climates, decision making comes hard for some administrators and the increased number of negative decisions which we will be forced to make will tempt a number of us to "return to our first love, teaching," and many of our faculty members will request relief from critical committee assignments. It is my contention that we cannot afford the luxury to resort to a "If-you-can't-stand-the-heat-get-out-of-the-kitchen" approach. It is hot in most of our academic kitchens, and it will probably get hotter. Rather than dream of the good old days when we could periodically

find relief in our formal academic dining rooms, we need to try to turn the heat to our advantage, and use it to cook up the highest quality academic programs possible. If the economic conditions prevent most of us from building the spacious dining rooms that are the dream of academe, let's at least be resolved to establish the best dining areas possible within the confines of our respective academic kitchens.